

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 304680

FOL REPEAT MASEUR 1429 ACTION SECSTATE INFO JOHANNESBURG
LONDON PRETORIA DTD 26 NOV.

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L MASERU 1429

FOR AF PERRY AND DUNCAN

LONDON, JO'BURG, PRETORIA PASS TO ASSISTANT SECRETARY SCHAUFELLE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LT SF

SUBJECT: IMPACT ON

LESOTHO OF TRANSKEI BORDER CLOSURE

REF: STATE 283815

SUMMARY: TRANSKEI BORDER SITUATION REMAINS UNCLEAR. ORDINARY
BASOTHO REPORTEDLY CROSSING FREELY AND TRADE IN BOTH DIRECTIONS
UNIMPEDED. MINE WORKERS APPEAR TO BE UNABLE TO PROCEED THROUGH
TRANSKEI TO MINES IN RSA. FLYING OF MINERS FROM SOUTHEAST TO
MASERU FOR ONWARD TRAVEL TO MINES RECENTLY HALTED. GOL IS
PRESSING TO USE SITUATION TO JUSTIFY INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE
WITH ROAD IMPROVEMENT/CONSTRUCTION. ECONOMIC LOSS TO LESOTHO
WOULD PROBABLY BE RESTRICTED TO LOSS REPATRIATED WAGES FROM
MINE WORKERS. EFFECT ON SOUTHEAST LESOTHO,
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HOWEVER, WOULD BE SERIOUS A RESULT OF UNEMPLOYED MINERS. SEE

ALSO COMMENT PARA 7.

1. IN RESPONSE TO QUESTION FROM CHARGE, PERMSEC FONAFF STATED THAT GOL ANTICIPATES DISCUSSING WITH ASSISTANT SECRETARY SCHAUFELLE SUBJECT OF CLOSING OF TRANSKEI BORDER. MOSHOLOGU REGRETTED INABILITY REPLY TO QUESTIONS PARA 2 REFTEL DUE TO PREOCCUPATIONS WITH AAI CONFERENCE PREPARATIONS. CONSULTATIONS WITH BRITISH HIGH COMMISSION AND PRIVATE BUSINESS SOURCES MASERU ARE BASIS FOR FOLLOWING OBSERVATIONS.

2. ACTUAL SITUATION ON TRANSKEI BORDER REMAINS A MATTER OF CONSIDERABLE CONJECTURE AND UNCERTAINTY. ALL SOURCES AGREE THAT TRANSKEI IS REQUIRING VISAS FOR ORDINARY BASOTHO TRAVELERS CHARGING FEE OF 50 CENTS. REPORTS ON DURATION OF VALIDITY OF VISAS VARY FROM FEW HOURS TO 3 MONTHS. VISA IS REPORTEDLY ISSUED ON SEPARATE SHEET RATHER THAN IN PASSPORT. ENTRY/EXIT STAMPS ARE PLACED IN PASSPORT. ORDINARY BASOTHO TRAVELERS REPORTEDLY HAVE NO RPT NO DIFFICULTY ENTERING, TRANSITING, EXITING. GOL, WHILE INSISTING BORDER IS CLOSED, HAS NOT SPECIFIED CONDITIONS OF CLOSURE EXCEPT THAT MINERS HAVE BEEN PREVENTED FROM CROSSING TO TAKE UP EMPLOYMENT IN RSA. BHC AND I HAVE DISCUSSED THIS AND CONCLUDE THAT PROBLEM LIKELY IS THAT APPROPRAITE RESIDENCE/WORK PERMITS REQUIRED UNDER AUGUST 1973 LABOR AGREEMENT (NOT CUSTOMS AGREEMENT AS STATED PARA 2A REFTEL) CANNOT BE OBTAINED EXCEPT AT SPECIFIED BORDER POSTS ON LESOTH/RSA FRONTIER. SINCE RSA IMMIGRATION NO LONGER AVAILABLE AT TRANSKEI BORDER POSTS, THESE POINTS ARE EFFECTIVELY CLOSD TO BASOTHO MINERS.

3. RECENT UNDERTAKING BY MINERS ASSOCIATION TO FLY MINERS FROM DISTRICTS BORDERING TRANSKEI TO MASERU FOR ONWARD TRAVEL TO MINES IN R A HAS BEEN STOPPED AS OF NOVEMBER 23. THIS IS CONFIRMED BY LESOTHO AIRWAYS SOURCE. BHC REPORTS THAT SOUTH AFRICA MINES ASSOCIATION IS SENDING A DELEGATION TO MASERU ON DECEMBER 9 BUT EXACT MISSION OF DELEGATION IS NOT KNOWN. INITIALLY IT WOULD SEEM THIS IS A MOVE TO FIND A WAY AROUND THE PRESENT EXIT/ TRAVEL DIFFICULTIES OF THE MINERS.

4. ALL REPORTS EXCEPT THOSE OF GOL INDICATE THAT TRADE OUT OF AND INTO SOUTHEASTERN LESOTHO THROUGH TRANSKEI IS PROCEEDING WITHOUT ANY SUBSTANTIAL SLOWDOWN. THIS IS APPARENTLY DUE MAINLY

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TO THE FACT THAT TRADE IN BOTH DIRECTIONS IS IN SOUTH AFRICAN HANDS AND THUS INVOLVES NO RECOGNITION/VISA/TRANSIT PROBLEM ANY WHERE ALONG THE LINE IN EITHER DIRECTION. MOHAIR, THE ONLY IMPORTANT EXPORT, IS COMING OUT THROUGH TRANSKEI UNIMPEDE ACCORDING TO OUR SOURCES. SUPPLIES FOR SOUTHEASTERN DISTRICTS ARE REPORTEDLY FLOWING IN UNIMPEDED. NO REPORTS FROM P.C.V'S OR OTHERS TO THE CONTRARY. WITH ORDINARY BASOTHO ABLE TO ENTER TRANSKEI FOR REFORVISIONING, THERE WOULD PROBABLY BE NO SERIOUS

FOOD SHORTAGE AND WE HAVE NO REPORT OF ANY SUCH. NO REPORT EITHER OF FUEL SHORTAGES ETC.

5. REGARDLESS OF FACTS, GOL IS PRESSING HARD TO EXPLOIT SITUATION TO OBTAIN INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE PARTICULARLY FOR ROAD IMPROVEMENT AND CONSTRUCTION. MINISTER OF FINANCE SEKHONYANA HAS JUST COMPLETED TRIP TO LONDON AND BRUSSELS (AND POSSIBLY BONN AND THE HAGUE) SEEKING EDF ASSISTANCE WITH TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT, PARTICULARLY FOR INTERIOR ROADS. ACCORDING TO MAP (COPY BEING POUCHED) PROVIDED BY MINFONAFF ROADS IN QUESTION WOULD CONNECT MOUNT MOROSI (NEAR QUTHING) WITH QACHA'S NEK ON THE SOUTHEAST BORDER; MONT SONYONE THROUGH THABA TSEKA NORTHEAST TO MOKHTLONG; AND A NORTH SOUTH CONNECTION FROM LETSENG LA TERA I IN THE NORTHEAST THROUGH MOKHTLONG TO QACHA'S NEK. THE TOTAL COST OF THESE ROADS WAS GIVEN TO THE BRITISH AS 21 MILLION DOLLARS.

6. WITH REGARD TO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS PARA 2 REFTTEL, PRELIMINARY REPLIES FOLLOW:

A. LANGUAGE OF LABOR AGREEMENT OF AUGUST 1973 (NOT CUSTOMS AGREEMENT) WILL BE PROVIDED BY GOL.

B. PRESENT STATUS OF TRANSPORT OF WFP AND CRS FOOD STUFFS IS REPORTED NORMAL APPARENTLY BECAUSE ALL TRANSPORT IS SOUTH AFRICAN IN ORIGIN. WILL TRY TO PROVIDE PROJECTION FOR FUTURE ASAP.

C. EMBASSY NOT ABLE TO PROVIDE RELIABLE ESTIMATE OF POSSIBLE LOSS TO GOL CUSTOMS RECEIPTS. FONMIN ESTIMATED 2 MILLION RAND. GOL TRADE PROMOTION OFFICER ESTIMATED ONLY ONE TWENTIETH OR ONE TWENTY-FIFTH OF TOTAL TRADE PROCEED THROUGH LESOTHO/ TRANSKEI BORDER POSTS. IN ANY CASE, IF OUR REPORTS OF UNINHIBITED CONFIDENTIAL

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TRADE ARE SUBSTANTIATED, GOL LOSS WOULD BE LIMITED TO LOST REPATRIATED MINERS' WAGES, NOT RPT NOT TO LOSS OF CUSTOMS DUTIES.

D. EFFECT ON OVERALL ECONOMY WOULD BE AS STATED UNDER (C). EFFECT ON SOUTHEASTERN POPULATION WOULD BE MORE SEVERE SINCE UNEMPLOYED, STRANDED MINERS WOULD SUFFER SERIOUS LOSS OF INCOME WITH NO ALTERNATIVE EMPLOYMENT AVAILABLE. CANNOT JUDGE EXACT IMPACT, HOWEVER.

E. SEE COMMENTS PARA 3 ABOVE)

F. EMBASSY AND BHC CALCULATE THERE HAS BEEN NO RPT NO SUBSTANTIAL CHANGE IN TRAFFIC OVER PRIMITIVE INTERNAL ROADS (TRACKS) LEADING TO SOUTHEAST DUE TO SIMPLE INESCAPABLE FACT THAT IN PRESENT CONDITIONS, THESE TRACKS ARE IMPASSIBLE FOR MOTOR

VEHICLES.

G. RAIN WHICH REACH PEAK IN JANUARY- MARCH WILL SERIOUSLY
REDUCE AIRLIFT CAPABILITY BUT CAN HARDLY DO MORE THAN ELIMINATE
ENTIRELY STRETCHES OF IMPASSIBLE TRACKS.

H. WILL BE TREATED IN SEPARATE MESSAGE(S)

7. COMMENT: BHC VERY SKEPTICAL OF GOL ASSERTIONS CONCERNING
BORDER CLOSURE. WE SHARE SOME SKEPTICISM BUT BELIEVE GOL CASE IS
BASED LARGELY ON MINERS' SITUATION AND ALLEGED VIOLATION OF
LABOR AGREEMENT BY RSA. SINCE GOL DOES NOT RECOGNIZE THAT TRANSKEI
REPRESENTS A CHANGE. GOL ATTEMPT TO USE SITUATION TO JUSTIFY
FOREIGN ASSISTANCE FOR ROAD IMPROVEMENTS/CONSTRUCTION HAS
SOME VALIDITY IN OUR VIEW. INDEED, LESOTHO INTERIOR ROADS ARE
SO LACKING AS TO INVITE FOREIGN ASSISTANCE FOR THIS PURPOSE WITH-
OUT BORDER CLOSURE. AT THIS POINT, WE BELIEVE ASSISTANT SECRETARY
SCHAUFLE SHOULD BE SYMPATHIC LISTENER, URGING GOL TO COME
FORTH WITH MORE INFORMATION ON SITUATION AS HE DID IN MEETING
WITH LESOTHO AMBASSADORS. WE SHOULD REFRAIN FROM ATTEMPTING TO BE
THE "OBJECTIVE" OR INFORMED SOURCE OF INFORMATION THAT WOULD
CONTRADICT OR BELIE GOL ASSERTIONS SINCE THIS MIGHT PLACE US
IN POSITION OF LENDING CREDENCE TO SA CASE.
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